

CHURCH: East German Protestants Urge 'Peace Service' as an Alternative to Draft

By HARRY TRIMBORN,
Times Staff Writer

BONN — The East German Protestant church, apparently emboldened by church-supported peace movements in the West, has taken up a call by disaffected youth for a "social peace service" as an alternative to East Germany's military draft.

The number of East Germans seeking alternative service has climbed to more than 4,500, according to a report from West Berlin. The peace service, or *friedendienst*, would permit men 18 to 25 to engage in social work among children, the elderly, the handicapped and others in need of personal assistance as an alternative to military duty. One proposal calls for 24 months of such service, six months more than required for army service, but equal to the time required for navy or air force duty.

Like all other Communist states, East Germany rejects the concept of conscientious objection to military

service, but it does allow those opposed to bearing arms to serve in quasi-military construction units.

The government has rejected non-military alternative service on grounds that it would be contrary to the government's "fundamental conviction" that military strength is the greatest safeguard to peace.

Klaus Gysi, East German state secretary for church affairs, called the church's proposal a violation of the country's commitment to the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact alliance. He claimed it implies that regular conscription is "anti-social," a view rejected by the Communist Party.

The government views the proposal with alarm because it calls for official recognition of a general right to refuse any form of military service.

However, according to reports from East Berlin, Gysi left the door open by stating that all matters in church-state relations are open to discussions.

Such discussions could no doubt be tense, due to the uneasy relations between what churchmen call "the throne and the altar."

Under a 1971 agreement, the dominant Evangelical (Protestant) Church and the state have an accommodation under which the church avoids any political opposition or anti-Communist activity in return for considerable internal autonomy and freedom to pursue humanitarian activities.

Catholics Reject Deal

The agreement affects only the Protestant church, by far the largest in East Germany with about 8 million members or 80% of all believers among the country's 17 million inhabitants. The 1.2-million-member Roman Catholic Church has rejected any accommodation with the government on grounds that Christianity is incompatible with the atheistic doctrines of the Communist state. As a result, it is subjected to considerable harassment but allowed to operate under the ostensible constitutional guarantees of freedom of religion.

The Protestant church's position was spelled out at the time by Bishop Albert Schönherr, then chairman of the Evangelical Church Federation: "We don't want to be a church against socialism, nor a church alongside socialism, but a church in socialism."

The call for alternative peace service has strained church-state relations in East Germany at a time of growing international tension.

The issue represents a "tremendous challenge" to East Germany's Communist leaders, already badly shaken by the liberalization movement in neighboring Poland and the general decline in East-West relations,

said Ronald D. Asmus, a Radio Free Europe analyst in Munich. It is seen as part of an apparent growing restiveness in the East German church.

East German pastors have been using the pulpit and church declarations to voice concern over Eastern as well as Western arms policies and what they feel is the militarization of East German youth, especially through paramilitary training courses for school children.

Dresden church leaders, in an "address to the parishes" last August, deplored what they called "the ever-increasing weight of militarism in our society."

East Germany, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, increased its military expenditures between 1977 and 1980 by about 25% in real terms, with the total reaching nearly \$4.5 billion last year.

The churches have called for reductions in nuclear weapons and other armaments in both the Communist and Western arsenals.

The government of Erich Honecker has voiced support for the growing peace movements in Western Europe, while rejecting pacifism at home. Yet Bishop Heilrich Rathke of Schwerin declared last summer, "It is dangerous when in both East and West the world pacifism is often treated as a term of abuse. Pacifists help prepare peace; we need such people."

"The mood of the East German church is seen as a reflection of the anti-war and disarmament activism of the Protestant church in West Germany, with which it has close ties.

Leadership Questionable

In West Germany, about 50% are Protestants and 44% Roman Catholic.

The leadership of the church in East Germany's pacifist stirrings is open to question. Some sources say it is merely responding to grass-roots feelings, especially among young people, and has assumed, as the Roman Catholic Church in Poland does, the role of a moderator between the people and the government. In this view, the church is pictured as taking up the peace cause in order to sustain its credibility among the people as a moral force in the nation.

"Traditionally, some of the older church leaders have been leery of social protest by young people," Radio Free Europe researcher Asmus said. "They are not quite sure they are Christians in the usual sense."

An indication of the church's role as an arbiter, rather than an activist, in the touchy peace-oriented issues is seen in the church's declarations that it is prepared to present the young people's views to the government, and vice versa.

Bishop Johannes Hempel of the province of Saxony declared recently that the church will "stand together with the young people as far as our conscience allows. We will obviously open our arms and speak openly with those whose motives originate in their evangelical beliefs."

The issues originated last spring among young people, especially in the Dresden area, who called for a possible alternative to the draft in letters and petitions to authorities.

The alternative service would be patterned after the one established for conscientious objectors in West Germany in 1969. The West German service is considered the most liberal and extensive in the world.

The issue came to the attention of an Evangelical Church synod in Dresden, which took up the cause with the government.

Gysi, the state secretary for religious affairs, warned in discussions with church leaders that the issue could lead to a confrontation with the state. He charged that alternative service would be tantamount to "lifting general military conscription." He insisted that the "construction soldier" option, in force since 1964, already provides an alternative service to those opposed to bearing arms.

However, opponents maintain that the construction service bears military trappings. Construction unit members must swear allegiance to the National People's Army and must wear military uniforms as they work on military buildings and other facilities.

Plagued by other troubles, the regime is apparently helping the alternative service issue will fade away.

"In a way, the events in Poland are a help in the issue," researcher Asmus said.

"The security forces are so busy guarding against the infiltration of the 'Polish Disease' that they haven't got time to worry about East German youngsters who don't want to do military service."

Older churchmen have been leery of social protest by young people.

have called on their incumbents and parochial church councils to make plans for the return of the forces. Dr. Chavasse, bishop of Rochester, gives five suggestions in which wartime experiences both on the home-front and in the field can be used. There might be for example street or district wardens to give notice to the incumbent and to the reception committee of men and women who are returning to their homes. Army chaplains should keep in close touch with parish priests. Since many soldiers have found new reality in the services provided for them in the field, the reception committees should consider how services at home can be made more vital and hold the men when they return. Perhaps the most important suggestion is that use must be made of "Padre's Hour," in which each week the men of a unit meet the chaplain and religious questions are asked and discussed. This method has proved so valuable that it must not be allowed to fall into disuse. There should also be councils of help and advice in which the cooperation of doctors, lawyers and men and women of affairs and experience can enable a parish priest to deal with what must be "for a time a chaotic situation."

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A Ship of Peace Sails the Pacific

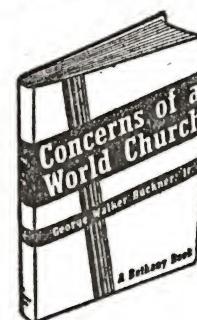
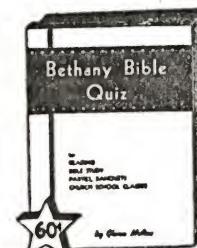
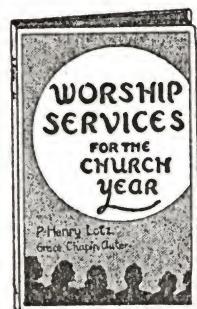
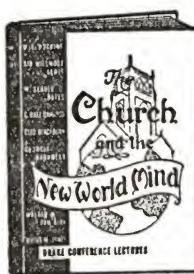
It was 100 years ago yesterday (March 20) since the first John Williams, a vessel given by children to the London Missionary Society, was launched at Harwich. It was wrecked on Danger Island in 1864. But there has been a line of ships bearing the name of John Williams. To this hour there is one doing a restricted but necessary work among the Pacific islands. It was to link together the missions of the L.M.S. in these islands that the ship was built when Williams himself went to the South Seas. It was a happy suggestion of someone that the children of the churches should build the ship. To this day they collect for the same purpose; I remember doing this in my childhood. Indeed the ship has had a place in the heart of generations of friends of the L.M.S., and it has always kept alive in us the romance of the missionary service among those islands which were once known only to us, as we supposed, and now are everyone's concern.

EDWARD SHILLITO.

Archbishop of York Defends Bombing

In his first interview given since his arrival in this country, Cyril Forster Garbett, archbishop of York, declared that most of the English clergy believed bombing of German cities should be continued if it would hasten the war's end. He told of plans to rebuild all England's historic churches. Others, he said, will be rebuilt only if postwar community rebuilding justifies their reconstruction. He declared that there is a revival of religions going on in Russia, in which country he spent ten days last fall, and defended the British policy on Palestine as the only one possible now. The interview was given in the Waldorf Astoria hotel, New York city, on Good Friday. The archbishop went to Washington from New York and later will visit Chicago. During the interview he wore the gaiters and apron which are associated with his office.

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